

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL TELEVISION APPEARANCES

Whether you initiate television coverage or a library event or issue (sometimes controversial) brings the cameras to you, you can maximize the time you will get to make your point and send your message. The following tips will help you make the case for your library and enable you to leave the listener with a strong sense of what your message is:

- **Be Prepared!** If you initiate the coverage you will have plenty of time to prepare, and nothing will stand you in better stead than to feel completely in command of the information and message you wish to send. On the other hand, as your library becomes increasingly high profile in your community, it is possible that the camera crew will simply show up someday to investigate a news story (often controversial, if you didn't get any notice). Of course you can decline an interview if you didn't get notice and that may be the best recourse in some cases. However, if this is about a library policy issue, a pending referendum, or some other library matter that is not personal, you will probably do well to try to get your message across and mitigate any controversy to the best of your ability. "The director refused to comment," doesn't sound that great on the six o'clock news. Even if you had no warning, however, that doesn't mean you shouldn't be prepared. You know what issues might be controversial in your community and you know what your library's message is. *Don't panic.* Take a deep breath, remember the message, and use it to turn a potentially negative interview into a positive one. Your library's mission is to do good, to provide a unique and important service! You're one of the good guys, so let that guide your approach.

- **Be Repetitive.** Even if you get a full half-hour or an hour on a local news station that specializes in local issues, this is still a brief time, and your job is to leave the audience remembering one or two key points. In fact, it's unlikely they'll remember more than that. Decide ahead of time what you'd like everyone to remember, and bring the conversation back around to that issue or point several times throughout the interview (see **Bridge, Hook, and Flag** below).
- **Be Yourself.** The more relaxed and personal you come across, the more the audience will like you. The more your audience likes you, the more they will listen to what you say and believe in you and your cause. Speak conversationally—try to imagine that you are explaining things to your best friend.
- **Share Anecdotes.** Libraries have stories—lots of stories. Keep some of them in your mind and use them during an interview. Facts and figures are not memorable. They are fine for written reports, but they should be kept to a minimum during a television interview or during any speaking engagement. It is better to illustrate a point by showing how it matters, how it actually made a difference to a patron in your library.
- **Use Statistics** (if you must). Sometimes statistics are so compelling they can really make the case for your library—but they really should be kept to a minimum. If you are going to use them, try to put them into human context. For example, “67 percent of the people in this city use our library on a regular basis. That means that even if you don't use the library, it is likely that the neighbors on either side of you do,” or, “87 percent of our student body used the library last year, triple the percent that attended a collegiate athletic event.”
- **Bridge, Hook, and Flag.** These are three techniques for controlling the conversation or interview so that you are sure to convey to your audience the main point or points that you want remembered.

Bridge. This technique will allow you to move from an area in the conversation that you don't want to discuss and get the conversation back to your message. If the reporter says, for example, “wouldn't it help the library if you began to charge user fees?” You can get the conversation back to your message by responding, “I think the real question is, how important is the library to the well-being of this community? If we can agree that lifelong learning is critical for individual success in the 21st century, then how can we afford *not* to fully fund libraries and certainly, funding the public library is an important governmental responsibility.” This may even be a

good time to follow up with a fact to emphasize the *value* of the library. You could finish by saying, “In fact, did you know that even though nearly 70 percent of our citizens use the library on a regular basis, only 1 percent of the city’s operating budget is used for their funding?” The main thing is, you don’t have to come up with this off the top of your head—you should be prepared with this bridging statement prior to your interview. Remember, *be prepared!*

Hook. This is a technique that gets the interviewer to follow up on your first point, allowing you to get a second point in. For example, you can say, “There are two very important considerations that must be taken into account before we support this proposed policy. The first is . . .” and then expand on that point. The interview will seem incomplete when aired if the reporter doesn’t follow up with, “and the second point?” This is a good way to ensure that both your points get air-time.

Flag. This technique is the easiest, and most people use it unconsciously all the time. Flagging alerts your listeners to what you consider most important. It’s a good way to emphasize the key point or points you want the audience to remember. Flagging is simply giving your audience a verbal clue about what is important: “The most important thing to remember is . . .” or “If you remember nothing else, please remember these two points . . .”

- **Don’t Repeat a Negative.** The reporter or interviewer might say something like, “Isn’t the proposed increase for your library going to hurt the police department?” You don’t want to repeat “hurt the police department,” so your answer shouldn’t be “our budget isn’t big enough to hurt the police department.” If you respond in this way, the audience has now heard “hurt the police department” twice and the reporter may repeat it to you again. Though this is a fairly common question asked of public library directors and it seems a difficult one on the surface, it’s actually a soft ball. Instead of repeating the negative phrase, you can respond with, “In fact, most consider libraries part of the solution for public safety. We know that long-term education is the best means of crime prevention, but even in the short term, our library serves hundreds of teens after school every day, giving them something productive and fun to do and keeping them from being bored and on the streets.”
- **Look Professional.** Remember, television is a visual medium and your presence will create an impression about you and your integrity. Even if you are a Birkenstock kind of person, for the interview dress professionally. A good rule of thumb would be

to dress as if you were applying for a high-level job interview. Wear solid colors, minimize jewelry, and if the station crew isn't set to do make-up, be sure to put on a shine-reducing powder. Women should wear lipstick and blush that is darker than usual so the face doesn't fade under bright lights.

- **Stay Calm!** You're the expert here so relax and try to enjoy your opportunity to tell the library's story. Concentrate on speaking to the reporter or interviewer as a person and forget the camera and lights. Establish eye contact with him or her and keep an "open face" (no frowning, tight lips, or furrowed brows!). Soon you really will forget the camera and you will be getting that important message out there to everyone who's tuned in.

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